

America's Godmother

French Town Where America Was Named Is To Be Restored

By Robert Yoakum

SINCE the end of World War II there have been many private American projects to rehabilitate war-shattered French towns, but perhaps the most appropriate of these schemes, from a historical point of view, calls for the reconstruction of Saint-Die, "the Godmother of America."

Saint-Die, a small town in the Vosges Mountains in eastern France, was completely burned by German troops as they retreated eastward in 1944. One of the many buildings which was totally destroyed was the House of America, so named because it was built on the site of the printing office in which the word "America" was first given to the New World.

A newly created group, known as "Friends of Saint-Die in America," headed by Willy Heineberg, president of the Socotab Leaf Tobacco Company, and Nathaniel T. Helman, a New York State Senator, will raise funds in the United States to help in the reconstruction of the town. Mr. Heineberg said in Paris that the organization, with headquarters at 10 E. 44th St., New York, would support work carried on since the liberation by "Les Amis de Saint-Die," a French group headed by Pierre Jolly.

AMERICA and the Vosges town have been linked, in one way or another, for 444 years. Saint-Die was intellectually active and influential as early as the fourteenth century, and in 1415 Pierre d'Ailly published in the town a kind of encyclopedia called "Imago Mundi," in which he expounded the theory that other lands lay to the west between Europe and the Indies.

Nearly 100 years later, on April 25, 1507, the Alsatian scholar, Mathias Ringman, aided by other members of the Collegium Vosagense in Saint-Die, published a

new edition of the geography of Ptolemy. In the preface to the quarto ("Cosmographic Introductio") M. Ringmann wrote:

"Up to this time all the known parts of the world had been thoroughly explored. Then Amerigo Vespuce (Amerigo Vespucci) discovered a new continent. . . . I do not see why this new land should not be named for the man who discovered it with so much perspicacity: Amerige, meaning land of Americ, or America. Were not Europe and Asia named for two women?"

FROM that date on, when the word "America" was invented and printed for the first time, Saint-Die has had important ties with the United States. It was a man from Saint-Die, for example, who presented the United States with the Statue of Liberty, greatest of all Franco-American friendship symbols.

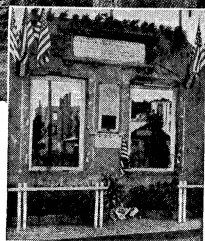
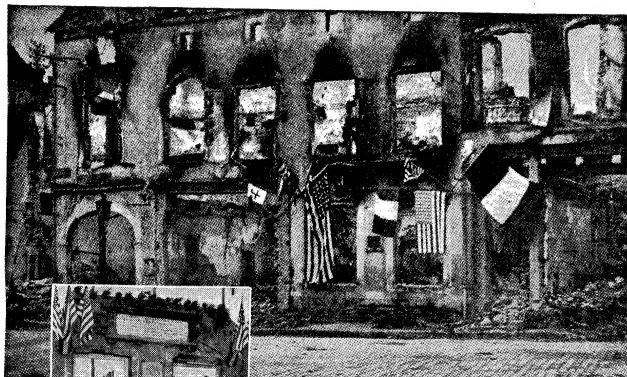
In 1911 American Ambassador Robert Bacon dedicated a plaque on the House of America, a ceremony which was marked by two days of festivities. And in 1918 United States troops under Maj. John G. Emery, founder of the American Legion, prevented the Germans from re-entering Saint-Die.

Saint-Die suffered even more in World War II, the greatest part of the town having been burned down in November, 1944, for no apparent reason by German troops.

The aim of the "Friends of Saint-Die in America," according to Mr. Heineberg, is to raise enough money in the United States to help Saint-Die in the reconstruction of its most valuable buildings, such as the cathedral and libraries. The group also intends to erect a chapel in front of the destroyed original copy of "Cosmographiae House of America" in which the "Introductio" would be exhibited.



Where America Got its name...



The house above was the first to be burned in 1944. It was at this place that America was first named. Inset shows plaques as they were before World War II. They have now been demolished for reconstruction.

VISIT SAINT-DIÉ CITY OF CALVARY

Here, April 25, 1507...

During the reign of René II, "Cosmographie Introductio," in which the new continent was given the name America, was printed and published by members of the "Gymnase Vosgien":

GAULTIER LUD, NICOLAS LUD,
JEAN BASIN, MATHIAS RINGMANN,
MARTIN WALDSEEMULLER.

RELATIVELY few Americans know what they owe to Saint-Dié, the small town in the Vosges. In 1507, in Saint-Dié, Ringmann and Waldseemuller, when told of the voyages of Americus Vesputius, printed for the first time the name America on a map of the New World. In 1884, Jules Ferry, then Foreign Minister and former Deputy from Saint-Dié, presented to the United States the Statue of Liberty. In 1911, American Ambassador Robert Bacon inaugurated the plaque reproduced above. In 1918, part of the front Saint-Dié-Saint-Mihiel was heroically held by American troops under Major John Emery, later decorated by Marshal Foch. And in November, 1944, the German Army in retreat, after taking prisoner all able men of Saint-Dié, willfully burned the entire town, house by house. Saint-Dié is now a shrine for every American. Visit it yourself, and learn its history.

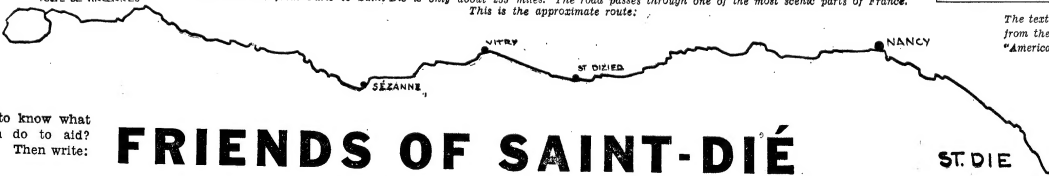
"Up to this time all the known parts of the world had been thoroughly explored. Then Americus Vesputius discovered a new continent, which will be discussed forthwith.

I do not see why this new land should not be named for the man who discovered it with so much perspicacity: Amerige, meaning land of Americus, or AMERICA. Were not Europe and Asia named for two women? As for the position of the new land and the customs of its inhabitants, these are fully explained in the account of the four voyages of Americus. The world, then, consists of four parts, of which we knew only the first three,—the three continents. The new fourth part is on island—at least that is the present thought, as the sea surrounds it on all sides."

PARIS

POITE DE VINCENTES

The distance from Paris to Saint-Dié is only about 235 miles. The road passes through one of the most scenic parts of France. This is the approximate route:



Do you want to know what more you can do to aid? Then write:

FRIENDS OF SAINT-DIÉ

c/o 10 EAST 44th STREET, NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

The text at top is a translation from the first plaque placed on "America House" shown at left.

Directly above is a translation from the geographical history in which America was given its name.

SAINT-DIE, GODMOTHER OF AMERICA

When and how did the New World receive the name - America?

It was at Saint-Dié, in 1507, that the word "America" was invented and printed for the first time.

At that time, the city centered around a chapter of canons; one of the great provosts of the chapter was the illustrious Pierre d'Ailly. While publishing a sort of encyclopedia entitled Imago Mundi in 1410, he expressed the opinion that the old continent was not the only one, but that in navigating toward the West one must encounter still-unknown lands before arriving at the Indies.

The work of the Grand Provost of Saint-Dié was one of those which determined Christopher Columbus to undertake his voyage and, actually, in 1492, he did discover these new lands.

But the Spanish government, far from giving these new lands the name of him who had increased its empire in this fashion, allowed the daring navigator to die in disgrace (1506). Among those who followed in his footsteps another Italian was then much better known - Amerigo Vespucci, or Améric Vespuce. While Columbus had not published anything, Améric told the story of his own discoveries. This came into the hands of an Alsatian, Mathias Ringmann, who was preparing a geographical publication at Saint-Dié at that time.

In 1507 a well-known treatise on the geography of antiquity was being edited - that of Ptolemy. As a preface, the members of the gymnasium and, it seems, Mathias Ringmann, drew up a Cosmographiae Introductio. In it they speak of Europe, Asia, Africa, and then there are a few lines, which may be translated as follows:

"A quarter of the world has been discovered by Améric Vespuce.

I do not see what would prevent us from calling it by the name

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of its discoverer, Améric, man of genius, either Amérigé in Greek, meaning land, or America in Latin."

A year later, a collaborator of Ringmann's, Waldseemuller, engraved in 1508, at Saint-Dié, the name América on a world-map edited by the Vosgian Gymnasium, and since then this name has always been used.

In 1891, Mr. Franck H. Mason, consul-general of the United States, published a study on The Baptismal Font of America.

In 1892, at the Chicago World Exposition, an entire section was dedicated to the documents on the Saint-Dié origin of the word "America". In 1908, the "Saint-Dié Press" published "The Romance of the name America" in New York.

In 1911, a commemorative plaque was placed on the house which had replaced the printing-office of the Vosgian gymnasium. Great festivities were held on the 15th and 16th of July in the presence of the United States Ambassador, Mr. Robert Bacon. Portraits of Vautrin Lud, chaplain of King René, of Ringmann and of Waldseemuller were tendered to him to be presented to his government. In an eloquent discourse, Mr. Bacon linked the memory of the independence of the United States to these festivities.

"It is you," he said, "citizens of the great sister-republic, our great friends of the Old World, to whom we, men of the New World, are doubly in debt: for our baptism and for our liberty. After French Lorraine leaned over our cradle to give us a name, it was France who threw her sword in the balance to give us independence. My presence among you proves that America does not forget, and will always keep a separate

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place in her affection for the pleasant Vosgian city of Saint-Dié, and for beautiful France."

In 1918, American soldiers arrived at the front around Saint-Dié, and the French joined them in celebrating American Independence Day on July 4th. The street which ended near the old printing-office of the Vosgian gymnasium (until then Rue de l'Orphelinat) received in its turn a new name: Rue de l'Amérique. Large placards, in English, apprised the soldiers from the United States that it was here that their continent had, for the first time, been called America. At the top of the placards a single star had been painted.

"The star which appeared one day at Saint-Dié, and which you have called America, has been multiplied on a starry firmament on our flag. The child has grown a little, has wanted to see and know his godmother who, up until now, he had seen only in a dream. That is why I am here, and why I am happy to be here - the reality has surpassed the dream." So did Mr. R. Bacon express himself in 1911.

Among the illustrious Americans who wanted to see and know their godmother in reality, that is to say, those who came to visit Saint-Dié, we will mention only the President of the University of the State of New York, Mr. John H. Finley, Commissioner of Education, a magnificent poet as well as a profound thinker.

After a pilgrimage to Saint-Dié in May 1917, he composed some stanzas entitled Lille, Laon and Saint-Dié, in which we read these beautiful lines:

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IV

SAINT-DIE

How dear to us is this little city in the Vosges, watching from afar the clamor of the Battle of the Marne, and murmuring to herself the word which she was the first to pronounce before the rest of the world, this word which has since reverberated over the entire planet - "America". It is there, in this little city, now defaced, blackened by the cannon of the Huns of the High Culture, that spouted the spring from which our beloved country was baptised: it is in her ancient cloister, refuge of scholars, where may be found the baptismal fonts of our New World. So, thanks to God, America, Goddaughter of France, saved by France, will rise up at her side and will fight for her.

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